

15 EDITING YOUR WORK

Making sure that your work has met with all the requirements you were given and that it is a finished product is an essential step in the process of academic writing. We suggest that as you read through this chapter you check the advice in it with an assignment that you have to give in shortly. Alternatively you could find one that you have recently completed and reflect on how it compares to the standards we suggest.

This chapter will cover:

- using a checklist to edit your work
- checking for grammar and proof-reading
- using a draft to edit your work.

USING THIS CHAPTER

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INTRODUCTION

Editing involves looking at your work with a critical eye, measuring it against certain standards and then changing it to meet those standards. Before you start to edit your work you should feel satisfied with its overall shape, confident that you have answered the question set and are ready to hand your work in on time. If you can leave yourself enough time (a few days perhaps) between finishing the work and the deadline to review your work you will find this really beneficial. It will mean you can look at what you have produced more objectively, notice anything that may be missing and spot mistakes.

Editing is best done in stages, in which you check for different things. The more times you can read through your work, focusing each time on a different aspect and correcting where necessary, the better it will become. You can choose any order that suits you to do this, what matters is that you read your work more than once.

THE PROCESS OF EDITING

As we have said before in this book, academic writing has certain qualities that mark it out from other kinds of writing. These qualities could be summed up as:

- structured and complete
- relevant
- well communicated
- unbiased
- economical
- owned by you
- fully referenced.

You can use these seven qualities as a checklist, to decide what and how much editing is needed for any piece of work that you do.

STRUCTURE

There is always an expectation that academic writing guides the reader through the text, not only by developing ideas and arguments in a logical manner but also by ordering the material. This means that you need to check for two kinds of structure: internal and external.

Internal

Make sure that:

- there is a logical flow to your writing

- all your paragraphs link together
- all ideas are developed fully in the paragraphs or sections
- the text does not jump from one idea to another and then back again.

External



See
Chapter 13

If your assignment includes a table of contents you can use it to check the structure of your work. Otherwise make sure that:

- all sections of the assignment are present and in the right order
- your pages are numbered and in the right order
- your name is on the document
- any appendices are in the right order
- your references are included.

In addition, ensure that:

- you have a title page (if required)
- all headings and subheadings (if required) are numbered
- you have included headers and footers (if required).

Activity 15.1 Correct the table of contents

Highlight the mistakes in the table of contents below. Look at the order of the chapters, the page numbering and the subheadings.

INTRODUCTION

- | | |
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| 1 Relationship-based and reflective approaches for contemporary social work practice | 1 |
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Part One UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL WORK

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RELATIONSHIP-BASED SOCIAL WORK WITH USER GROUPS

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(Wilson *et al.*, 2008: v)

RELEVANCE

See
Chapters 1
and 12

Your work has to carry weight and authority if readers are to trust in what you write. You must therefore ask yourself the following questions and make corrections if any of your answers are 'no'. If they are, these corrections are likely to be major ones, and you would need time on your side to make them.

- Have I answered the assignment brief?
- Have I used the right format/genre?
- Are my facts correct?
- Is all the material relevant?

COMMUNICATION

Your reader will find it more difficult to understand your meaning if your language falls short of certain standards. Although this is to some extent a matter of style, which is a personal thing, there are some rules you can follow to make sure your language is appropriate. Form and content must work together and not against each other.

Is the language appropriate?

See
Chapter 6

This means that, unless you are quoting from the original text or writing reflectively, your writing should not use any:

- contractions (e.g. 'hasn't', 'didn't', 'they're'): instead write 'has not', 'did not', 'they are'
- text speak (such as 'l8r' instead of 'later')
- colloquial speech (such as 'footie' instead of 'football')
- exclamation marks
- unfinished sentences
- repetition of phrases
- questions (such as 'Who would have thought that...?').

Has the grammar been checked?

Your use of grammar depends on your knowing and understanding the rules of the language you are writing in. If you feel unsure of these, get hold of a grammar book and check. Some of the most common mistakes are with:

- tenses
- irregular verbs
- subject/verb agreement.

Tenses

You need to make sure that you use the right tense for your verbs. If, for example, you start a sentence with the words 'Last year', make sure that any verb that follows is in the past tense.

Example: Last year China **hosted** the Olympic Games.

Irregular verbs

A regular verb in English ends in '-ed' (such as the word above, where 'hosted' is the past tense of 'host'). Irregular verbs have a variety of forms, some of the most common being:

go – past tense is 'went' (go – went – gone)
 see – past tense is 'saw' (see – saw – seen)
 take – past tense is 'took' (take – took – taken).

If you are not sure what the past tense of a verb is, look it up. You will find that dictionaries often include a list of the most common irregular verb forms.

Subject/verb agreement

Check that the verb is in the singular or plural, according to the subject.

Example: In the UK a general election normally **takes** place every four or five years.

Activity 15.2 Spot the mistake

Each of the following sentences has a grammar mistake in it and one of them has two. Highlight all the errors and correct them.

- 1 Last month the government introduces new regulations for small businesses.
- 2 Investors who buyed shares in the dot.com industries saw there value fall over time.
- 3 Historians disagrees over the origins of communism.
- 4 Under-age drinking are a major problem today.
- 5 You're work has to carry weight and authority if readers are to trust in what you write.

Is the punctuation correct?

Punctuation acts to break sentences into units that allow you to understand meaning. Although punctuation is to some extent a matter of style, there are some basic rules that do not change.

- **Full stops (.)** – to show the end of a sentence. A capital letter must follow a full stop. For example:

This year there was snow in London in October. This is the first time this has happened since 1934.

- **Commas (,)** – to separate parts of sentences. The three examples below show the effect of commas on meaning. In the first example there are no commas. The addition of commas in the second means that the sentence reads more fluently and makes more sense. In the third example, the commas are in the wrong place and the sentence makes little sense.

Without commas: The rules of a particular sport such as the off-side rule in football or the rules of a club are designed to bring order to a particular activity. (Keenan and Riches, 2007: 3)

With commas: The rules of a particular sport, such as the off-side rule in football, or the rules of a club, are designed to bring order to a particular activity.

Commas in the wrong place: The rules, of a particular sport, such as the off-side, rule in football or the, rules of a club are, designed, to bring order to a particular activity.

- **Apostrophes (')** – to show possession, for example:

Great Britain's power as a colonial ruler.

The twentieth century's most important invention.

Be careful not to put an apostrophe where it is not needed. It is ungrammatical to write:

The strength of the law lies in it's power to protect the individual.

- **Quotation marks (' ')** – to show that you are using the words of someone else. For example:

As Shakespeare said: 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be.'

- **Colons (:)** – to add extra information after a clause. For example:

We need three kinds of support: economic, moral and political.

- **Semi-colons (;)** – to separate items in lists, especially if these are long and complicated and already contain commas. For example this text is discussing the Council of the European Union:

In the latter case each country has a certain number of votes (France, Germany, Italy and the UK have 29 votes each; Spain and Poland have 27

each; Romania 14 votes; the Netherlands 13 votes; Belgium, Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary and Portugal have 12 votes apiece; Austria, Sweden and Bulgaria 10 votes; Denmark, Ireland, Lithuania, Slovakia and Finland seven votes; Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg and Slovenia have four votes each and Malta has three). (Keenan and Riches, 2007: 29)

- **Capital letters (A, B, C)** – to start a sentence or for a proper name. For example:
English, Berlin, December.

Activity 15.3 Correct the punctuation

The following paragraph has no punctuation. Make all the corrections you think it needs.

the current cultural context in which we find ourselves located allows little opportunity for silence and appears to place little value on it our shopping centres offices cars and homes are full of sound some might say noise and the invention of email mobile phones and ipods means people are constantly in communication with each other and are able should they choose to to talk or listen to someone or something all the time under these circumstances silence is an unfamiliar phenomenon therefore when it is encountered it can be unnerving and potentially be perceived as threatening and deskilling yet we would argue it should not be and need not be
(Wilson *et al.*, 2008: 310)

Is everything written out in full?

An acronym is when the first initials of a group of words are used to make another recognised word. If you use an acronym write it in full the first time, followed by the shortened version. After that, you can use the shortened version each time. For example:

United Nations (UN)

You should not use an abbreviation in a piece of academic writing, unless you are quoting from the original text.

Correct spelling?

It is important that words are spelt correctly. Good spelling makes a good impression and helps make the meaning clear. The following two examples demonstrate the effect spelling can have on first impressions.

Correct spelling: There are 365 days in a year. There are 52 weeks in a year and 7 days in a week. There are 24 hours in a day and 60 minutes in an hour.

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Incorrect spelling: Their are 365 daze inn a yere. There are 52 weaks in a yeare and 7 daze in a weak. Theyre are 24 ours in a day and 60 minits in an hour.

Sometimes it is difficult to know the correct spelling for a word. For example:

‘Exaggerate’ not ‘exxagerate’

‘Committee’ not ‘comittee’

‘Management’ not ‘managment’

‘Necessary’ not ‘necissary’

If you know you are not a good speller, use a dictionary and make use of the spell-checking facilities provided by your computer. Try also to learn the correct spelling for as many words as you can.

Activity 15.4 Correct the spelling

In Activity 15.2 you corrected some mistakes in grammar. Now correct the spelling mistakes.

- 1 Last month the governement introduced new regulashions for small businesses.
- 2 Investores who bought shairs in the dot.com industries saw their value fall over tyme.
- 3 Historyans disagree over the origins of comunism.
- 4 Under-age drinnking is a major problam today.
- 5 Your work has to carry wait and authority if reeders are to trust in wot you write.

Proof-reading

Word processors can do much of the hard work of proof-reading so make sure you use the grammar and spell check. The system is not foolproof, however, as the following two examples show. The first is an example of what happens when you hit the wrong key.

Example 1: typing mistake

the Hundred Years Waf

instead of:

the Hundred Years War

‘Waf’ is not a word, so will be flagged up by the spellchecker. It is not safe to assume, however, that the right word will be the first one on the list of suggestions offered. The correct word ‘War’ is fourth on the list in the most common word processing package, Word. It comes after ‘waft’, ‘wave’ and ‘wait’.

Example 2: mis-typing a word

Technology has produced many fine, **tin** fabrics.

instead of

Technology has produced many fine, thin fabrics.

If as in this example you type 'tin' instead of 'thin', a word processor will not correct it. You could then have a sentence that would not be picked up by the spellchecker but would make no sense at all.

So, remember that you will always need to read your work through, either to check for sense or for common mistakes such as 'their' (the possessive pronoun) instead of 'there' (adverb of place).

TIP *If you have time, read your work aloud to yourself. It should help you to decide if there are mistakes in your grammar or if you have mis-typed a word.*

How good is the look and feel?

See
Chapter 13

The final area where communication is helped is in how your writing looks on the printed page. Chapter 13 gave you detailed advice on presentation: look back at it and think about the following:

- the typeface (an assignment will often give guidance on this, but avoid elaborate or unusual fonts)
- the layout – how much space is there between paragraphs and lines?
- paragraphs – are they more or less of equal length or do you have too many short paragraphs?
- your use of white space (margins, at the top and bottom of a page)
- charts – these must all be clearly labelled
- graphs – make sure the scale is good enough for them to be understood.

BIAS

Another expectation of academic writing is that it is not one-sided, that is to say it considers both sides of an argument. If you are given an essay title that asks you to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of an issue, you will be expected to give equal treatment to each side. If you are asked to consider the causes of a particular event, you will be expected to explore each cause you write about in equal measure. This is something to think about when you are reading through your work. If you feel that it is one-sided then you need to try and correct the imbalance.

ECONOMY

When you write an assignment you will almost certainly be given a word limit. Often you will be given a range to work within (that is, a minimum and maximum word length). Alternatively, you may be told what the tolerance is, such as 10 per cent over or under the word limit. Pay attention to this information, as you do not want your work to lose marks if you write too much or too little.

Have you written too much?

If you find that you have gone beyond the acceptable word limit you will need to cut out some of your writing. Try to make the decision rationally. You could perhaps:

- use fewer examples in your discussion
- check that you have not repeated yourself and made the same point several times over
- remove any material that you think is not central to the assignment.

Have you written too little?

If you find that you are under the acceptable word limit you will need to expand your writing. This problem is often linked to not exploring an issue fully enough or providing enough detail in the analysis. Try to develop your writing in a structured way:

- Look back at your original plan and check that you have included all the points.
- Look through the notes you made. You may be able to expand on some of the points.
- Look at the topic sentence in every paragraph. Have you developed each one fully enough?
- Have you given enough examples to support the points you are making?

If you do have to cut out material, bear in mind that your work must still make sense, read logically and keep its structure.

OWNERSHIP

Your writing must demonstrate that you are the originator of and are in sole control of the words. You want to avoid the charge of plagiarism at all costs and need to ask yourself these questions:

- Have I used my own words except for when I have quoted something?
- Is it always clear when I am quoting or citing another writer?
- Can the reader tell this is my own piece of work?
- Does my own voice come through?

←
See
Chapters 2
and 6

←
See
Chapters 10
and 11

If you have access to anti-plagiarism software, use it to check that you have not accidentally copied words or failed to use quotation marks. If you submit your work electronically you may in any event find that your work is automatically checked for plagiarism.

REFERENCING

See
Chapter 10

The final area to consider is your use of referencing, to ensure that your work has the completeness it needs for a piece of academic writing. You need to check that you have acknowledged all your sources, both in the text and in your reference list, and that your references are accurate. Well-written references are always appreciated by the marker and you are likely to be marked down if they are wrong or of poor quality.

Activity 15.5 Improve this referencing

Read this paragraph and then look at the references that follow it. The writer has made several mistakes in the list of references. Highlight them and make the corrections using the referencing guidelines in Chapter 10.

The multi-layered nature of the problems experienced make decisions both about how to intervene and where to intervene very problematic and can lead to workers choosing either to 'condemn or condone' as opposed to sitting on the fence somewhere (Kroll and Taylor, 2000). In addition social workers have to be able to separate recreational drug use from problem drug use (Harbin and Murphy, 2000) without over-reacting to the former and under-reacting to the latter (Gilman, 2000). As mentioned previously, this means it is important to treat each case individually and without preconceived notions of the quality of care drug users can provide. If this is not the case, then again, as pointed out by Taylor and Kroll (2004, p.1117):

there is the danger of either making unfounded connections and assumptions between chronic substance misuse and parenting or of under-reacting and failing to identify the maltreatment that a significant minority of children experience.

References

Harbin and Murphy. Background and current context of substance misuse and child care. In F. Harbin and M. Murphy (eds), *Substance Misuse and Child care: How to Understand, Assist and Intervene When Drugs Affect Parenting*, (pp.109–155) Lyme Regis: Russell House

Giman, M. (2000) Social exclusion and drug using parents. In F. Harbin and M. Murphy (see above for details).

Kroll, B. and Taylor, A. (2004) Working with parental misuse: Dilemmas for practice. *British Journal of Social Work*, 34,1115–32

(Wilson *et al.*, 2008: 602)

15 Editing your work

Using a draft

See
 Chapters 1,
 6 and 14

Often you are able to hand in a draft to your lecturer for comments. Whether you have been given formal feedback on it or not, editing a draft version is one way of improving your work. You should compare your draft with the following items:

- the assignment brief
- the assignment marking criteria
- the plan you wrote for the assignment
- the notes you made
- the feedback you received on the draft.

Activity 15.6 Comparing your draft

Find the documents mentioned above.

- 1 Read the assignment brief and marking criteria again. Now check your draft. Does it meet the instructions and criteria?
- 2 If not, make corrections.
- 3 Read the plan you made and the notes you wrote. Does it follow them and include all the information you wanted to put in?
- 4 If not, make corrections.
- 5 Read the feedback. Have you addressed the comments?
- 6 If not, make corrections.

SUMMARY

Any piece of academic writing needs to go through the process of being edited. This book has been edited. Editing work is something that you have to make space for if you want to hand in a piece of work that does justice to your efforts. It is part of the debate you will have with yourself (consciously or unconsciously) about whether you want just to pass or to do well in your academic studies. It allows you to understand yourself as a writer and provides you with tools for developing your skills in handling the written word.

References

Details of highlighted references can be found in the Introduction on page xxii.